Marie Martin
*Videoconferencing for Schools: Pedagogy and Practice*
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Marie Martin asserts in her book, *Videoconferencing for Schools: Pedagogy and Practice*, that videoconferencing is a technology whose time in education has come. If she is right, and I believe she is, then her book is also timely. For there are still those who remain unconvinced of the power of technology to liberate learning and learners and who view technology as a deadening influence on young minds and imaginations. No one who reads this excellent treatise on the use of videoconferencing in schools could fail to be enthused by the lucid explanation of what videoconferencing is and by the clear and helpful guidance on the protocols to be adopted for successful videoconferencing experiences.

For me, though, the most exciting and engaging aspect of the book is the wide variety of case studies which Marie has discovered in her research for the book. These studies exemplify for me all of the reasons why technology is so important in today’s classroom. What she describes are real learning experiences where children are fully engaged with the educational process and with school. In many cases, the experiences are life enhancing events, real life encounters with children from other countries, learning about life, the universe and everything. Children in a school two blocks from Ground Zero engaged with children from Omagh sharing experiences of real sorrow and supporting each other through a programme of peer counselling. How much more real does it get? Storytelling, myth and the magic of discovering a culture far removed from one’s own, children from St Joseph’s High School, Derry do just that with an interactive encounter with a Cherokee chief, right there in their classroom: from Portstewart to NASA via video link and the primary school children on our North Coast start to explore the universe with those people who were the first to ‘boldly go’.

In my own school, we are just beginning to discover the delights of this particular technology and we have been encouraged to do more based upon the successes we have already had—enhanced provision at AS and A2 Level through distance learning, an English Department link with a school in Pittsburgh which is looking at developing writing skills and a new link under development with Irish Medium schools.
I fully intend to make Marie’s book widely available to my staff. If it lights their ‘blue touch paper’ as it has lit mine, and I am sure it will, then all of our pupils can look forward to mind-expanding real and virtual experiences using a technology that is becoming ever more easy and transparent to use and, very importantly, ever more affordable.

One of the great merits of this book is that it presents in a concise and very readable format the fundamentals of both theory and practice. It is therefore an invaluable guide, which will be of immense practical benefit to teacher educators, to classroom teachers, and to all those seeking to integrate technology into classroom practice. It merits a place among the essential reading materials in every educator’s reference library. I do hope that the book will be widely used—it is an important milestone in the journey towards empowering learners through technology.

Adeline Dinsmore is principal of Ashfield Girls’ High School in East Belfast. Originally from East Belfast, Dinsmore is committed to raising the aspirations and expectations of all of the students at Ashfield. She is also passionate about the capacity of information and learning technologies to empower learners. The school has recently been accorded specialist status for ICT and this will allow for the further development of ICT/ILT reaching beyond the school to develop new communities of learners. Dinsmore has won awards for promoting the use of information and learning technologies and has given presentations in Northern Ireland, the UK and USA, and in Australia. She represented Northern Ireland at the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Forum in Philadelphia in 2006. The school hosts many visits from professionals from across the globe looking at good practice in the classroom and at the leadership style which has effected radical and innovative change. Dinsmore was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for her services to education.